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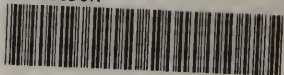
ANNEX

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BLIGHTY

by

HAROLD HAYS, M. D.

Major, Medical Corps, United States Army
during the World War

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Christmas Greetings--1920

Just before Christmas, 1917, I was serving with the 110th Field Ambulance of the British Army. We were billeted in a tiny village, far behind the lines, in a Rest Area. We arrived in a snow storm and for two days were without our equipment and almost without food. There was nothing to read; there was little to do. I picked up some scraps of paper on which I wrote this story.

May you have a very Merry Christmas and a Happy New Year! And may peace be everlasting!

Cordially,

Harold Gey

B L I G H T Y

THE large gambling casino on the white pebbly shore front of the Normandy village shines brightly in the crisp winter sunshine. Within, the long tables with their spinning wheels and clink of chips on the green cloth are no more. For the big casino is now a hospital for wounded Tommies. Rows of low iron beds, covered with white counterpanes under which comfortably lie the wounded men, fill the main floor, rise in tiers on the raised platforms along the walls, and spread out on the uncurtained stage. Some of the beds have clumsy wooden apparatus over them from which are suspended an arm or a leg as the case may be, held in unsightly position by ropes, pulleys and counter-weights of bags of sand.

Sergeant Sam Deaver, of a Canadian Regiment, occupied a bed over in one corner. There was nothing particularly noteworthy about him except the perpetual air of cheer-

B L I G H T Y

fulness on his broad heavy face, and the position of his right leg, which was held in bandages in an iron frame a few inches above the bed covering.

Two ward screens covered with cotton sheeting surrounded the bed next to him. "That poor Bo must be in a bad way," he thought, for it was only when dying that patients were hidden from their fellow sufferers by sombre screens.

Deaver tried to raise himself up enough by his handstraps suspended on either side from the wooden apparatus enclosing his bed, to see around the corner of the screen. He couldn't get far enough over, try as he might.

A groan and mumbled unintelligible words came to me from behind the enclosed bed as I passed it on my way to Sam Deaver.

"Good morning," I said, as I drew my chair up close to Sgt. Deaver's bed. "How are you this morning?"

"Fine and fit, and hope you are the same," he answered. "Have a cigarette, Doc?"

"Don't mind if I do." I took one with him, and reflected whether I should be smiling and wanting to smoke a cigarette if I were ly-

BLIGHTY

ing in bed as he was. For it was only five days before that Deaver had had to have his leg refractured and set properly.

"Why are you so happy this morning, Deaver?" I asked, as I looked into his happy smiling face.

"Got my ticket to Blighty," he replied, puffing on his cigarette contentedly.

"So at last you've got your ticket. I presume that means that in a few weeks you will leave us. Tell me, Deaver, why are you all so keen on Blighty?"

He closed his eyes for a moment, and then opened them dreamily.

"Did you ever hear the song called 'Blighty?' " he laughed.

"Well, here's the chorus, well as I can remember it:

"Take me back to dear old Blighty;
Put me in a train for dear old London town;
Take me over there, drop me anywhere,
Liverpool, Leeds or Manchester—where I don't
care.

I should like to see my best girl—
Cuddling up again we soon shall be.
Whoa! Hi-te-tiddley highty,
Hurry me home to Blighty;
Blighty is the place for me."

B L I G H T Y

"Ain't much of a song, is it?" he said. "But it's got the pep alright, and means a lot to the boys. But it ain't all that Blighty means." He narrowed his eyes as he looked at me.

"Ah, Blighty," he resumed. "Can you reckon what the word means? Three years of fightin' in this Godforsaken land, with nothin' to think of but somethin' to eat, how to keep yer rifle from rustin', and how to keep yourself from gettin' shot. Three years of man's hell! Never in my life did I think war was like this—stickin' in dirty, stinkin' trenches, with mud up to yer knees, day in and day out; with nothin' to do but watch for a damned old Boche. Then—back to the rest areas! More dirt, more filth, and yer toes stickin' through yer boots—and no more boots. Sleepin' in barns night after night, wid rats for company, and the smell of manure to soothe yer to sleep. Many a night I wished for a Blighty—a nice little bullet wound through the arm or leg. But none would come my way until I got this." He pointed to his fractured leg.

"But, you're a Canadian, Deaver. Why

B L I G H T Y

does going to England make you so happy?" I asked. "I can well understand a man who lives in England wanting to get there—to get home, to see his friends. But why a soldier from Canada or Australia or New Zealand cares whether he goes on or stays at the Base, in a nice, warm, comfortable hospital, I don't understand."

He looked at me disgustedly.

"Huh, easy to see you ain't never been out to the front," he replied. "Did you ever live wid the clothes on yer back for a whole month? Did you ever go without a bath until yer skin was so caked wid mud that you couldn't see the pink of it? Did you ever have them burly jaspers—polite people call them cooties—walking all over you until you couldn't sleep of nights? Did you ever have the rats play tag in yer bed when you needed sleep so bad you couldn't keep yer eyes open? No; you haven't.

"Do you know what Blighty means, Doc?" he asked, after he finished his nauseating questions.

"No," I answered. "I have heard all sorts of explanations, but I don't think I

BLIGHTY

ever heard the right one."

"Well, I'll tell you." He hunched himself on one elbow, and relapsed into a half dreamy state again before he replied.

"Blighty is the Hindu word for Paradise—at least, so I'm told, and England means Paradise to any British soldier, no matter where he hails from. I ain't partickler about England, and it ain't England itself we think of. It's what Blighty stands for. I ain't sayin' we ain't comfortable here, but when you get to England you're further away from France, and can't get back quick, either. The English Channel ain't very wide, but there's somethin' beyond it that spells—*home*. There's people dressed up like people there, wid regular clothes on.

"Maybe when we are working hard in the trenches, freezin' to death inch by inch, we thinks of Paradise—of Blighty. We see ourselves across the Channel in nice comfortable billets, with real beds. We feel the nice, white sheets around us. We see nice, pretty girls runnin' 'round and feedin' us cigarettes and grub—there ain't no true vision of grub, only it ain't bully beef and biscuits.

B L I G H T Y

I thought so much of Blighty before I came here that I wished to be wounded or killed—when I went over the top the last time.”

“Tell me about that, Deaver,” I said.

“Aw, it ain’t nothin’,” he answered. “I didn’t do nothin’, but them other boys what didn’t come back was heroes.

“Well, as long as you wants to hear it, here goes:

“One dark morning we was all sittin’ in a little narrow trench,” he resumed. “A full platoon. We was all tired and hungry. You see we had only been out of the line three days when we was called back to help out in another push which didn’t succeed. I remember what Jim Rooney and Tim Blakes, my pals, what stood on both sides of me, said—

“‘Ain’t this a hell of a war!’ says Tim. ‘Gorblimey, if I don’t gets my Blighty this time I ain’t never goin’ to get it.’

“‘I knows you wants yer Blighty mighty bad, Tim,’ says Rooney, on the other side of me. ‘So do I. I been in this war nigh on three years and ain’t been scratched, and some as calls me lucky, but this time I goes

B L I G H T Y

back for sure.'

"Do you call that courage? Naw, that ain't courage, it's just desperation. Every man in that platoon was dog-tired, and knowed that the only way to get comfort was to get a Blighty, and get away from the dirty mess for a little while anyway.

"They all wants to go over the top. We was nervous and cold. We wasn't nervous from fear, but because we had to wait until that zero hour, when our guns would bang away and cover us. They calls it a barrage.

"At last the time come and our boys, with a lot of others, jumps on the parapet, halts a minute, and then runs through the opening in our wire. We are only allowed to go a certain distance till the barrage lifts, you know. So when we gets there, we lies down on our bellies and waits, and then we goes forward again. We gets to the Boche wire before he discovers us, and then Hell is let loose. The machine gunners turn on us, and the boys is mowed down somethin' awful, and then the Boche rifles begin to crack. We gets through the wire, kills a few Boches with our rifle butts, bayonet a few more and cleans

B L I G H T Y

the trench out wid bombs. Oh, it was a lovely sight—maybe. Dead Boches is everywhere, some wid their feet stickin' up in the air, and others buried on top of one another.

“Our boys hadn’t been saved none neither. They was lyin’ all over No Man’s Land, but we still had enough to go on.

“Our C. C. (Company Commander, you know) yells to us to carry on, and no sooner does he get the words out of his mouth than he crumbles up—like a caterpillar. We looks for our second in command, a little fellow who ain’t had to shave more than once or twice. He’s there alright, and takes us up to the second Boche trench. I ain’t been hurt yet, and there are a few other fellows what is whole, and so we takes the second trench—that was our objective. When I looks around I don’t see no Boches. They has all scampered. But I don’t see none of our fellows either. I suppose they was all dead or wounded—the little lieutenant what leads us, he ain’t to be seen neither.

“I wonders what to do, and then decides to get back. I ain’t gone more than to the first trench we captured when I hears a whiz,

BLIGHTY

somethin' snaps, and I falls over into the trench wid my right leg all twisted out of shape.

"I must of been unconscious for some time, for when I wakes up, it is dark, and the stars are shining. Everything is quiet, and I wonders where I am, and tries to move. My leg pains me somethin' terrible. I kind of guess I must be in a Boche trench. It was so quiet I wanted to holler.

"I makes up my mind somethin' must be done for my leg, and looks at it, lifts it gently, and turns it round so that the toes points up again. I nearly faints with pain. When I puts out my hand, I am fortunate in finding a Boche rifle which I place along the leg for a splint, and then I gets my first aid dressin' out, and takes my belt off, and ties the rifle to my leg. I must have suffered some, 'cause I went unconscious again. I don't know for how long.

"I wakes up wid a start. I feels somethin' fingerin' me.

" 'Hey,' I yells, 'git the hell out of here.' You see, I thought it was rats.

" 'Is it you, Jock?' I hear someone

B L I G H T Y

whisper. I knows by the voice it is one of our men, and asks him for water.

"He creeps near me, and hands me a canteen.

"I was never so thirsty in my life, but I just takes enough to make me comfortable, and hands the bottle back.

" 'Thank God for that water,' I says. 'What's yer name?'

" 'Johnny Latham—London,' he answers in a weak voice. 'What d'you go by?'

" 'Sgt. Sam Deaver—Canadian,' I answers.

"We must have fell asleep then.

"I wakes the next mornin' feelin' kind of bad. The sun is out. I looks 'round me. There is my friend of the night before, stretched out on a pile of dead Boches, sleepin' his head off, as peaceful as if he was in London town. It ain't time for the trench to smell bad yet, but the sight was somethin' awful.

"Latham didn't look as though he was hurt none. His limbs was whole, and he didn't have a mark anywhere. He was a pale little sinner, with a face the size of a penny.

BLIGHTY

"I wakes him after a while.

" 'Say, Bo, ain't you got nothin' to eat?'
I says.

"He rubs his eyes sleepily, same as if he was in bed, and then gets up wid a start and a shudder when he sees where he was, and what he was lyin' on, and then—he begins to cry.

" 'Cut out the weeps, man,' I said, 'It don't do no good. I knows you ain't a full-grown soldier by the looks of you. It's a shame they has to make infants come to war. What you bawlin' for, anyway? This ain't no wake.'

"He cries more and more until I got worried from the amount of water comin' from his eyes.

" 'Ain't you a soldier?' I says, soothin' like. 'Soldiers don't cry—perticklerly when they is nice and safe like us.'

" 'I ain't cryin' cause I'm a soldier,' he blubbered. 'It's 'cause I ain't a soldier—leastways I wouldn't be here if I was. Oh, I wish I could die. I wish I could die.'

" 'Shut up,' I yells.

" 'I ain't a soldier. I ain't a soldier,' he

B L I G H T Y

keeps on cryin'. 'I goes over the top 'cause they made me, and 'cause I wanted a Blighty, and—then I comes to this trench, and dives in—and stays here. I wants a Blighty to send me back home. When they goes over the top again, I stays here. I'm a damned coward, I am, and Gorbliney, I don't care. I wants to die!' And he cries some more.

"I looked at him kind of disgusted-like.

" 'Well, never mind, Bo,' I says, 'You gets your wish this time,' I says. 'Yer're goin' to die alright, there ain't nothin' else to do. We are the only livin' beings in this trench. We ain't got no food nor water, and I only got one leg. Of course, we might get some roast beef and ice cream off the dead Boches in here, and we might get trimmin's such as asparagus and cucumbers out in No Man's Land tonight. We might, I say, if I was a whole man. Don't think I'm expectin' anything from you except dyin', but I thought I'd tell you, so you could die easier.'

"All that day we lies quiet. No one came near us. The dead Boches was beginnin' to steam some, but that didn't bother us.

"When it comes dark, my friend begins to

B L I G H T Y

look in his canteen. There ain't no more water. And then he feels out on the body, and gets a canteen and a box of biscuits. He was pretty lively actin' for a man what wanted to die.

"I didn't disturb him none. After a while he comes over and divides with me.

"He looks more cheerful after eatin', and then he tells me how he didn't want to go to war, and was conscripted. He was always afraid of a fight, and this was his first time in the trenches. When it was time to go over the top the Sergeant has to boost him over. He hoped he'd get a Blighty, so he could go home for good, and afore he knows it, he is in this trench, sound and whole.

"'And now,' he says, 'I don't know what to do. I knows I'm a coward, I do.'

"I didn't feel sorry for him, only ashamed that our country had to take such men into the Army.

"A coward, did I say? H'm funny what kind of cowards some men are. I knows Generals what's afraid of rats, and other men what's scared of burglars—men what didn't know what fear was when it came to

B L I G H T Y

facin' the enemy. Johnny Latham maybe—was a coward afore I met him, but some things as I'll mention to you will show you the stuff *some* cowards is made of. The Victoria Cross wasn't good enough for him.

"The trench was gettin' somethin' awful in a few days, and the food and water was gone. Latham begins to want to live, and, what's more, he began to play nurse to me. He sees that my leg is comfortable, and every few minutes asks if there ain't somethin' he can do for me. Then, without my even suggestin' it, he begins to clean up. He gets hold of all the dead Boches, and piles them over in one corner, then he gets any blankets, or any other coverin' he can, makes a bed for me, and moves me over to it—me, a big, husky brute what is twice his size. At night I hears him movin' 'round, and then I sees he is liftin' those dead Boches over the top.

"I ain't sayin' nothin' to him, just watchin'. Later he comes to me, and gives me the last sip of water.

"Must a been about midnight when I wakes.

"Say, Bo, where are you?" I asks.

B L I G H T Y

“There ain’t no answer. I wonders where Johnny is, and I must a been watchin’ about two hours when I hears a scrap’n’ noise, and finally a head and shoulders appears over the top of the trench, and Johnny falls down near me wid his arms full of biscuits, bully beef and a couple of canteens.

“ ‘Where you been?’ I asks.

“ ‘Been out robbin’ the dead,’ he says. ‘We needs the stuff, they don’t.’

“And before he eats a bit he spreads out a feast for me.

“For four long weeks Latham stayed with me in that trench. Every day he would tell me stories of the life of London, and I’d tell him of myself and Canada. I finds out he was a messenger of some kind afore the war. He was very fond of his parents, and would write them letters on scraps of paper and put them in his pocket for future delivery. Every night, as soon as it was dark, he would crawl out on his belly into No Man’s Land, and bring us enough to eat.

“Most of the time things was very quiet. I don’t know why no one wanted that trench. We would hear the fightin’ around us, and

BLIGHTY

we would see star shells and verilights, but not a Boche or a Britisher came near us.

"As I says, we was pals for four long weeks, and then one night Johnny went out—and he never came back. I ain't never seen him since. All I can say is he was the bravest little coward I ever saw.

"By this time my leg was considerably mended. It was knittin' next to the splint, but it wasn't quite straight. My toes pointed out about forty-five degrees. I didn't have much pain, but every time I tried to stand, my leg wouldn't hold me up.

"Since Johnny was gone, I didn't have no way to get food or water. I still had three cans of 'bully' left and one canteen of water. I reckoned how long they would last me.

"I don't know how, but I kept alive for two weeks. My water gave out in a week, and I was dyin' for somethin' to drink. It was fortunate that it rained every night. I would lie on my back, open my mouth and let the rain drop in. I managed to collect a few drops in a canteen, too, by placin' it in a side of the trench where the rain was runnin' down.

"Them was two weeks of agony. Durin'

B L I G H T Y

the day I tried crawlin' round the trench, and at night I would look up at the sky, and dream and try to work out how I was to get away. I often thought of Johnny Latham. I wondered where he was—wondered whether he was just wounded, or whether he had been killed. I hope he was killed. There's a place for him in Heaven, I'm sure. Then I'd fall asleep, and not wake up again until I'd hear the barrage fire in the mornin'.

"There ain't much more to tell. One night I creeps over the top, and slowly makes my way on my belly, draggin' my bum foot after me, until I gets to our barbed wire. A bullet passes over me, and I knows then I've been seen.

"'For God's sake,' I yells, in a hoarse whisper, 'I'm a Kanuk, let me come through.'

"It is quiet again, and so I creeps along until I fall into the trench.

"I don't remember what happened; I must of been all in. I feels myself bein' carried, and hears someone say somethin' about skin and bones—meanin' me, I suppose.

"The rest ain't interestin', Doc, but when I comes through, I prays for Blighty—and now

BLIGHTY

I got my ticket.

"Blighty—that is a wonderful word. I ain't carin' how it's spelled, or anythin'—I knows what it means. And when I get there, I hopes I'll never leave Blighty again, 'cept to that real home across the seas."

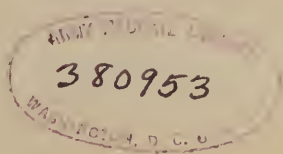
Deaver turned over on his side and reached toward the white enamel table beside him for another cigarette.

There was a groan from the next bed, behind the red ward screens, and an inaudible mumble, which became louder, as the poor tortured man, lying there delirious, tried to make himself heard.

Gradually he quieted down, and his ravings became more distinct.

"Deaver, Deaver," he kept on repeating; "Sergeant, Canadian—I want's a Blighty. I'm a damned coward, I am. I ain't a soldier. I wants to go home—home," and the moaning ceased.

"My God," cried Deaver, as he flopped back on the bed his face pale, his eyes bulging, "It's him!"



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